



Testimony of
John Brady, Executive Vice President
AFT Connecticut, AFL-CIO

Labor and Public Employees Committee Hearing
February 25, 2016

**SB 134 An Act Concerning Severe Mental and Emotional Impairment
and Workers' Compensation Coverage.**

Good afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak and members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee. My name is John Brady and I am the Executive Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of union of over 30,000 public and private sector employees including state employees, nurses, healthcare workers, teachers and other school personnel. I am here today to testify in favor of **SB 134 An Act Concerning Severe Mental and Emotional Impairment and Workers' Compensation Coverage.**

In addition to being Executive Vice President of AFT Connecticut I am a Registered Nurse with 21 years of emergency room experience. I have seen first-hand the emotional trauma caused by a violent act. In fact, I have experienced this trauma myself.

Early in my career, while working in the emergency room, a psychiatric patient attack me, placing his large forearms around my head. I was not physically injured but I believe this was only because he intended me no harm. I have no doubt that if he had wanted to, he could have broken my neck in an instant. Although physically uninjured, the emotional scares stayed with me for years. In fact, it was nearly a year before I was able to enter that room again.

I should have had intensive counselling, I should have been treated the same as if I had been physically injured, but even to this day, such an attack would not qualify under Workers' Compensation.

The world has changed a great deal since our workers' compensation statute was first enacted. Sadly, we live in a more violent society. Modern scientific research has shown that human beings, though they often can withstand and recover from the most debilitating of physical injuries, are often far more harmed by the emotional impact of the

circumstances in which those physical injuries were sustained. We know now about post-traumatic stress disorder and that it can be a completely debilitating condition. When injuries occur in the workplace, whether they are physical, mental or emotional, we must provide parity of coverage and treatment in our workers' compensation statute.

AFT Connecticut supports SB 134 with the belief that all workers should be included in the expansion of the workers' compensation coverage for individuals suffering from a severe mental or emotional impairment as a direct result of witnessing the death or maiming of another human being.

The traumatic event at Sandy Hook didn't just affect police officers, firefighters, and ambulance workers but also our teachers who AFT Connecticut represents. Sandy Hook Elementary School teachers and other school personnel experienced the most horrific workplace trauma than any of us could ever imagine. As most huddled quietly with small children hiding in classroom corners, closets and bathrooms, they heard the commotion and gunshots that killed their colleagues and 20 innocent, young students. After first responders arrived, teachers escorted their students out of the building through blood splattered hallways, past gruesome sights and into a chaotic scene of distraught families and emergency personnel.

Our members went to work on December 14th just like every other day in their careers. Those that survived will never be the same. They now carry the emotional scars and burdens from that event. They are nervous and anxious. They are worried about their safety. They have experienced survivor's guilt. They are worried about the well-being of their students and their families. They don't know if they can continue to teach and be responsible for the safety of an entire classroom ever again. Their world has turned upside down. They are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. And yet, they don't qualify for workers' compensation benefits.

I implore you to not let the Sandy Hook shooting be in vain. I implore you to remember the many nurses and other healthcare workers who yearly suffer attacks as I did. If good can come from these tragedies, one of the most important things would be to recognize the importance of mental healthcare, both for those struggling with mental illness and for those who have been impacted by violent events during the course of their employment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on this very important bill. I urge you to support SB 134 with the change that it includes all workers in the workers compensation coverage for severe mental or emotional impairment. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.